



Rights of Way Committee <rightsofway@rockportma.gov>

The Headlands

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To: Board of Selectmen <Selectmen@rockportma.gov>, DPW Commissioners <DPWCommissioners@rockportma.gov>

Cc: Mitchell Vieira <mvieira@rockportma.gov>, Melanie Waddell <lemerson@rockportma.gov>

An Open Letter to the DPW Commissioners and the Board of Selectmen from the Rights of Way Committee

July 7, 2022

Dear DPW Commissioners and members of the Board of Selectmen:

At its most recent meeting in June, the Rights of Way Committee (ROW) received a presentation by Mr. Wally Hess about the proposed improvements to the Headlands suggested by a small group of citizens with \$50,000 in private funds. The proposed plans would replace the existing paved path from Atlantic Avenue with stone dust, provide a newly cleared ocean view for the handicapped from that path, create a new path from Atlantic Ave that would be as much as 15'-30' wide, establish a large picnic area in the center of the Headlands made flat by the addition of stone dust, and construct a similarly wide staircase at the Old Garden Road entrance to the Headlands to deal with the wet, rocky conditions at that location.

After listening to this proposal, discussing it among the committee, and hearing comments from the public, the Committee would like to register our concerns:

1. Any replacement of the pavement on the path from Atlantic Avenue with stone dust would be immediately impacted by significant runoff from the steep grade there that would wash out the new medium. Additionally, the committee feels that the existing width of the pavement path there is ample, at 4 to 6 feet wide. The meandering shaded and wooded path there provides a beautiful entrance to the Headlands that supports abundant birds and should not be significantly changed.
2. Although the idea of an opening along the ocean side of the paved entrance to the Headlands would provide the handicapped with an ocean view, the width of that view should not exceed the capacity of the DPW to maintain it which would obviously be continually required. The DPW is not able at present to maintain even the existing paths within the Headlands which are maintained by ROW volunteers, so any additional clearings would be short lived without DPW resources to continually maintain them.
3. The addition of a new entrance to the Headlands off Atlantic Ave that would be 15'-30' wide and made level by the addition of stone dust is concerning. The Committee opted to make a site visit before commenting further on this and will send additional comments after our July 20 meeting.
4. The addition of a level picnic area in the center of the Headlands is viewed by committee members as a very bad idea. The very nature of the Headlands is beauty in the rough, and any attempt to develop this natural wonder would only denigrate it; and the addition of trash from a picnic area would only lead to litter throughout the area and yet another aspect of maintenance that the DPW cannot manage with their current workforce.
5. Finally, though the ROW is actively seeking a solution to the Old Garden Road entrance to the Headlands where the trail becomes very wet with bad weather, we believe that a minimalist approach is best here and propose, if approved by the ConCom, the addition of pea stone in the rocky depressions along the trail in this area. A staircase here would be another institutional addition that would denigrate a classically natural site.

Without a doubt, the Headlands is the crown jewel of Rockport's rocky coastline and a treasure cherished by locals and visitors alike. The natural beauty of the Headlands will only truly show if it is left in its natural state.

The members of the Rights of Way Committee do not support the proposed changes to the Headlands and strongly suggest that significant effort be made to solicit public comment on these proposed changes. If we can assist by hosting a meeting of multiple committees with interest in the Headlands, please know that we would be very happy to assist.

Sincerely,

Nathan W. Ives, Chair
Rockport Rights of Way Committee